Kristian Van Haesendonck, *Postcolonial Archipelagos: Essays on Hispanic Caribbean and Lusophone African Fiction*. Brussels: Peter Lang, 2018. 398 pp. (Paper US\$67.83)

An ambitious study that seeks through a comparative approach to tease out various points of convergence between a variety of linguistic and cultural traditions, *Postcolonial Archipelagos* is framed along three principal theoretical axes: the archipelago, conviviality, and creolization. Kristian Van Haesendonck posits the archipelago as a space for conflict, a plea for impurity, and a metaphor for tolerance and resilience. For him, conviviality is partly an attempt to adopt literary studies to a changing world, and to forge an alternative way of living together in which conflict is seen as inevitable but not necessarily destructive. There is always a productiveness to the tensions of conviviality. He argues that creoleness is a “natural condition” toward which postcolonial subjects strive (p. 55).

The book offers a range of readings of theorists and producers of culture from Africa and the Caribbean, and attempts to build conceptual bridges between architecture, urban studies, postcolonial theory, and literature, as part of an effort “to think in archipelagic modes” (p. 43), which for Van Haesendonck implies attempting to connect the unconnectable in an inflection of the heterogeneity that constitutes identity and, more generally, the human condition. Invoking the late Patrick Chabal, who challenged us to stop reading Portuguese-language literature from the continent as a discrete unit, Van Haesendonck attempts to bring into dialogue work from Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Puerto Rico, and the Caribbean more widely, both in situ and in diaspora.

He studies José Luís Mendonça, Eduardo Rodríguez Juliá, Raphaël Confiant (who is neither Hispanic nor Lusophone but Martiniquan, writing in French and Creole), Mia Couto, Guilherme Mendes da Silva, Junot Díaz, and Marta Aponte among other writers and theorists (overwhelmingly male, Aponte being the notable exception). By bringing together work from the Hispanic and Lusophone worlds, one of his aims is to contest the now-dated hegemony of compartmentalization that tends to relegate the status of two of the most widely spoken European languages (Spanish and Portuguese) to an afterthought or footnote in the theoretical discussions of the postcolonial condition.

Van Haesendonck’s push toward an innovative interdisciplinarity mostly targets the dogma of literatures studied within national categories, and against the backdrop of nationally delineated histories. This approach is certainly appealing in that it allows for new avenues of conceptual analysis to be probed, but it comes at a price that at times mars his study. Interdisciplinarity can lead to an oversimplification of the national contexts in which the specific texts

emerge. For example, in his discussion of the Angolan liberation movement, the MPLA, Van Haesendonck firmly asserts that it blindly embraced Marxism “without a basic understanding of its concepts” (p. 76) and was “artificially kept alive through Soviet support” (p. 77). The situation was considerably more complicated than this type of shorthand implies, and is often debated within Angolan studies. There was rarely an ideological consensus among the MPLA’s pre-independence leadership, who were far from being idiots unable to grasp the tenets of Marxism. For their part, the Soviets were on several occasions bounced into supporting factions of the MPLA by Cubans, with whom they often vehemently disagreed in regard to Lusophone Africa, and particularly Angola. As an aside, it seems to me that bringing together Cuban and Angolan texts makes more sense in a study that seeks to read the Hispanic Caribbean alongside Lusophone Africa, although it would run counter to Van Haesendonck’s aim to bring together the unconnected.

Another instance in which Van Haesendonck’s eagerness to provide “an alternative to literary studies understood as the study of national literatures” (p. 291) comes a little unstuck is in his misdirected critique of Maria Manuel Lisboa, who questions Mia Couto’s style and intended audience. He accuses Lisboa of measuring “Couto’s literary value in terms of local *inaccessibility*” (p. 337), but Lisboa is actually continuing a long-running discussion within Mozambican studies (going back to disputes about Rui Knopfli and her own father Eugénio Lisboa) about who is entitled to speak for, or at least represent, Mozambique. She is not questioning Couto’s literary worth but rather drawing attention to his complicated position as the nation’s leading writer. Van Haesendonck, in turn, fits Couto into his paradigm as a Creole writer whose biography somehow echoes that of Spanish settlers in the New World. His admiration for Couto is manifest as he praises the way the Mozambican’s work “appeals because of its accessibility, without overly simplifying the particularities of the Mozambican national context” (p. 120). And yet, as Lisboa points out, its accessibility does not extend to the average Mozambican from whose national context Couto profits as he writes.

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